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Department of
Agriculture**

**Forest
Service**

**Okanogan-Wenatchee
National Forest**

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**Bureau of
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File Code: 1950-1

Date: September 10, 2008

Planning Participant

We have previously sent you the Environmental Assessment for the Entiat 115kV Transmission Program (June 16, 2008). We are now pleased to announce the Decision Notice and Decision Record for this project. A copy is attached.

We have selected Alternative 1 and will issue a special use permit (USFS) and right-of-way (BLM) to Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County to construct the portions of this project that cross USFS and BLM lands. The 5.8 mile 115 kV electric transmission will parallel the south side of the existing Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) 345 kV and 500 kV transmission line corridors for the majority of its length. The line will cross public lands managed by the USDA Forest Service (2.6 miles), BLM (0.4 mile), Washington Department of Natural Resources (1 mile), and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (0.9 mile). The remainder of the line (0.9 mile) will cross private lands. This action is located within Township 25 North (T25N), Range 19 East (R19E): Sections 28, 33; and T25N, R20E: Sections 25, 26, 27, 30, 34, 35, 36, 31, 32, 33.

Construction of the transmission line is planned to take place in 2009. The substation is planned to be built in 2010 and the transmission line will be energized at this time through an interim ("shoo-fly") connection at the switchyard location. The switchyard is planned to be constructed in 2011.

If you would like further information regarding this project, please contact Tom Graham at Entiat Ranger District 509-784 1511.

Sincerely,

REBECCA LOCKETT HEATH
Forest Supervisor

KAREN KELLEHER
Wenatchee Field Office Manager



Entiat Valley 115 kV Transmission Program Decision Notice and Decision Record Finding of No Significant Impact

USDA Forest Service
Entiat Ranger District
Okanogan - Wenatchee National Forest
Chelan County, WA

USDI Bureau of Land Management
Spokane District Office
Wenatchee Field Office

BACKGROUND

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and combined Decision Notice and Decision Record is for the portions of the proposed action described in the Entiat Valley 115 kV Transmission Program Environmental Assessment (EA) that are located on National Forest System (NFS) and USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. This EA is incorporated here by reference. The Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County (District) proposes to construct approximately 5.8 miles of new 115 kV electric transmission line from a new switchyard that will be constructed near Earthquake Point to a new substation that will be located in the Entiat Valley, just north of Crum Canyon (see Attachment 1). We have decided to select Alternative 1 from the EA and will issue a special use permit (Forest Service) and right-of-way (BLM) to the District for the parts of the project located on NFS and BLM lands.

The USDA Forest Service is the lead agency for the NEPA analysis prepared for this project, with BLM serving as a cooperating agency under NEPA. Environmental analysis was also required under the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) for activities on state and private lands. The District is the lead agency for the SEPA process. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) are agencies with jurisdiction under SEPA. The EA documents the environmental analysis of the proposed action and alternatives in accordance with both NEPA and SEPA and satisfies the requirements of both statutes, pursuant to 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1506.2 and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 197-11-610. This FONSI and combined Decision Notice (USDA Forest Service) and Decision Record (BLM) document the findings based on the EA and the USDA Forest Service and BLM decisions.

The USDA Forest Service decision documented in this Decision Notice is the decision to issue a special use permit to the District to construct, operate, and maintain a new 115 kV transmission line across 2.6 miles of NFS land. The BLM decision documented in this Decision Record is the decision to issue a right-of-way to construct, operate, and maintain a new 115 kV transmission line across 0.4 mile of BLM land.

The selected alternative is located within Township 25 North (T25N), Range 19 East (R19E): Sections 28, 33; and T25N, R20E: Sections 25, 26, 27, 30, 34, 35, 36, 31, 32, 33.

The selected alternative is designed to correct a capacity deficiency in the District's Entiat service area. This capacity deficiency was identified based on projected electrical demand in the valley and the effects of this demand on the existing infrastructure serving the area. This deficiency is now apparent with the Entiat system experiencing brownouts and other outages due to the loads

on the system under certain conditions (EA, page 1-2). The purpose and need of this project is to correct this deficiency and provide reliable electricity to its customers in the Entiat service area without substantially interrupting existing service to Entiat Valley customers.

In 2005, the District formed the Entiat Valley Electrical Upgrade Focus Group (Focus Group), which consisted of local residents and Federal and state agency representatives, to assist in the development and review of potential options to improve electrical service to the Entiat Valley in Chelan County, Washington. In the fall of that year, the District and Focus Group identified nine route options, including No Action. The District commissioned a feasibility study to explore these options and solutions from an engineering and constructability perspective. These options and the findings of the feasibility study were reviewed and discussed in Focus Group meetings. Based on this collaborative process the District and Focus Group narrowed the options to the proposed action, which was presented to the USDA Forest Service and BLM in the form of special use permit and right-of-way applications, respectively.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

Decision Background

We have decided to select Alternative 1 from the EA and will issue a special use permit (Forest Service) and right-of-way (BLM) to the District for the parts of the Entiat 115 kV transmission line program located on NFS and BLM lands. The selected transmission line route will parallel the south side of the existing Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) 345 kV and 500 kV transmission line corridor for the majority of its length. The selected route will cross public lands managed by the USDA Forest Service (2.6 miles) and the BLM (0.4 mile), as well as public lands managed by WDNR (1 mile) and WDFW (0.9 mile). The remainder of the line (0.9 mile) will cross private lands. The new substation and switchyard will be located on private lands.

The key project components are described in the following sections and Chapter 2 of the EA (pages 2-2 to 2-7). Our decision also includes all mitigation measures identified in Chapter 2 of the EA (pages 2-7 to 2-14).

Right-of-Way Clearing—Clearing within the right-of-way will be limited to vegetation that could potentially affect the transmission line, mainly trees that exceed transmission line clearance requirements, which vary relative to the location of the transmission line structures and projected line sag. An estimated 150 trees on Federal lands (approximately 144 trees on NFS lands and less than 5 trees on BLM lands) will need to be cut under the selected alternative. Trees that are 20 inches diameter at breast height (dbh) or larger will be topped to enhance wildlife habitat. Other trees may also be topped to meet standards for snag retention. The majority of the cut trees will be downed and left along the right-of-way, except in areas where they will exceed fuel load density. If adjacent to an existing access road, downed trees could be removed for disposal as fuel wood or logs under USDA Forest Service or BLM permit.

Access—Access to the selected transmission line route will be via existing BPA access roads, which will be extended out to the new transmission line structures where necessary. Approximately 17 temporary access trails will be extended from the existing roads to the new structures during construction. Helicopters will be used to deliver and set structures in approximately nine locations. Access to the remaining three structures will be entirely via existing roads.

Approximately 4,100 linear feet (0.8 mile) of temporary access trails will be established with approximately 0.32 mile located on NFS land and 0.03 mile on BLM land. The remaining trails

are expected to be distributed as follows: WDFW (0.19 mile), WDNR (0.21 mile), and private (0.04 mile). The trails will be unimproved dirt roads without surfacing, or regular maintenance. These trails will be formed by transmission line construction equipment repeatedly driving along the same route. The construction contractor will flag the trails in the field and limit their width, which is expected to average about 18 feet wide. This average width takes into account areas where the trails will be wider to accommodate turning vehicles. The trails will be narrower in locations where they will be primarily limited to tracks created by the wheels of vehicles. Attached soils and plant materials will be washed or otherwise removed from equipment, including trucks and other operating equipment prior to mobilizing equipment into transmission line construction sites from other areas (EA, page 2-10).

Once transmission line construction is completed, the temporary access trails will be recontoured to as close as possible to original grade and reseeded with a variety of plant species approved by the applicable land management agencies (e.g., USDA Forest Service and BLM).

Laydown Areas—Three temporary work areas will be needed for materials and equipment staging during construction (each area will be approximately 200 feet by 200 feet). All three work areas will be located on previously disturbed NFS lands and adjacent to existing access roads. Structure poles will be staged in these areas prior to construction. Structure components and other construction materials will be placed on blocks of wood (“cribbing”) to keep them from direct contact with the ground. Trails will likely form around these areas as a result of repeated use and it may be necessary to lay crushed rock in some areas. In that case, the source of any gravel or fill will be obtained from a Forest Service-approved commercial source that manages its gravel for weeds (EA, page 2-11). All fill material will be removed following construction and the temporary laydown areas will be recontoured to close to original grade and revegetated. Attached soils and plant materials will be washed or otherwise removed from equipment, including trucks and other operating equipment, prior to mobilizing equipment into transmission line construction sites from other areas (EA, page 2-10).

Transmission Line Structures—Two pole, H-frame steel construction will mostly be used, except for dead ends and line angles where three pole structures will be used. Three-pole structures are used where there is a turning point in the line and the line needs extra support in each direction or to support very long spans. A total of 29 structures are estimated at this time. Thirteen of these structures will be located on NFS land and 3 will be located on BLM land. The remaining structures are expected to be distributed as follows: WDFW (5 structures), WDNR (4 structures), and private (4 structures). Each structure location would be prepared by clearing the area of brush and leveling two pads approximately 30 by 30 feet in size, except in those locations where holes would be dug by hand and structures installed by helicopter.

System Maintenance—Annual visual inspections of the new transmission line will be conducted via helicopter. It is anticipated that the newly installed structures and conductors will not need replacement or major repairs, assuming predicted growth rates and barring natural disasters, including wildfire and ice storms, for about 25 years. Life expectancy for the system is at least 50 years. The right-of-way and former trails will be checked at least annually as part of other routine work during snow-free periods. Weeds will be monitored annually. If weeds invade currently uninfested areas or are found to have spread from existing areas, they will be controlled either through herbicides applied by a licensed pesticide applicator under contract to the District or by mechanical or manual removal, depending on the landowner or land managing agency direction and permits. On NFS lands herbicides will only be applied to areas covered by the existing Wenatchee National Forest Forestwide Noxious Weed EA decision (1999), utilizing only herbicides approved in that EA. (EA, page 2-10 to 2-11)

Errata and Additional Information

The EA was issued by the joint lead agencies and the BLM in June 2008. A 30-day public comment period was provided and members of the public, interested organizations, and other public agencies were encouraged to submit comments in writing, via fax, email, or regular mail. The agencies received a total of three comment letters during the official public comment period, with two additional comment letters submitted after the end of the public comment period. These comment letters and the agencies' responses are part of the project file.

These comment letters provided additional information and requested clarification for some of the information presented in the EA. These minor additions and clarifications are presented below and are part of the information considered in the decision making processes employed by the USDA Forest Service and BLM. Changes to the text of the EA are highlighted as follows: existing text that is deleted is shown as "~~strike through~~" text; new text is underlined.

EA, page 1-8. The following assessment should be added to Section 1.6.3 of the EA: Other Analyses Considered and Incorporated by Reference:

"Entiat Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 46 Management Plan (Entiat Watershed Planning Unit 2004)

The WRIA 46 Management Plan addresses water quantity, instream flow, habitat, and water quality in the Entiat and Mad River watersheds as well as some of the minor Columbia River tributaries that lie to the north and south of the mouth of the Entiat River."

EA, page 2-11. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: "The District will manage noxious weeds in disturbed areas in cooperation with the Chelan County Noxious Weed Control Board and affected landowners and managers. On NFS lands herbicides will only be applied to areas covered by the existing Wenatchee National Forest Forestwide Noxious Weed EA decision (1999), utilizing only herbicides approved in that EA."

EA, page 2-11. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: "Clean gravel or a concrete mix may be used to backfill the structure holes where native material would not provide necessary stability. Crushed rock may also be laid in some parts of the project laydown areas on NFS lands. Gravel or fill will be obtained from a Forest Service-approved commercial source that manages its gravel for weeds."

EA, page 2-21, Table 2-7. The following row should be added to the purpose and need section of the table, directly below the row that addresses transmission line-related outages.

	Alternative 1 – Proposed Action	Alternative 2 – No Action
Address system problems without substantially interrupting existing electric service to Entiat Valley Customers.	Fully compliant. Service interruptions will be minor. Short-term interruptions will occur when the new substation and switchyard are energized.	Would not meet. This alternative would not address the existing system problems.

EA, page 3.1-3. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: “Construction of the Rocky Reach hydroelectric dam on the Columbia River approximately 13 miles south of the project area created the Lake Entiat reservoir and flooded the former townsite of the city of Entiat in 1961.”¹

EA, page 3.1-4. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: “In addition, significant flooding occurred in the Entiat Valley in 1948, 1956, and 1974 as a result of heavy spring rains and rain-on-snow events.”

EA, page 3.2-3. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: “The Alpine Lakes Wilderness, approximately 25 miles west of the project area, is the closest Class I airshed. However, wind patterns and specifically the way that winds blow along the Entiat and Columbia river valleys suggest that while the Alpine Lakes Wilderness is closer to the project, air impacts would be more likely at the Glacier Peak Wilderness. Potential air quality impacts to both of these ~~this~~ airsheds would be negligible under Alternative 1.”

EA, page 3.5-2. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: “Fire suppression combined with grazing creates conditions that support ~~oak regeneration and~~ invasion by conifers.”

EA, page 3.5-2. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: “The analysis area ~~does not occur~~ within the known range of the spotted owl covered by the Northwest Forest Plan on NFS lands, though it ~~It is also~~ included as a species of special interest by WDNR on their eastside planning units and critical habitat has been documented on the Wenatchee National Forest.”

EA, page 3.9-8. The following text should be inserted on this page as shown: “Construction of the proposed project under Alternative 1 is not expected to cause significant demands on public services or facilities. Alternative 1 would result in very limited, short-term interruptions to existing electric service to the Entiat Valley when the new substation and switchyard are energized. During construction, public services such as police, fire, and medical facilities, would only be needed in cases of emergency (i.e., construction accidents).”

EA, page 3.10-6. The following text on this page should be modified as follows: “The District would coordinate with the affected land management agencies to restrict construction activities in accordance with applicable fire-related standards and guidelines to periods of minimal fire hazard, and would obey Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and interagency industrial fire precautionary level restrictions on construction activities for fire danger.”

Environmental Documents Considered in this Decision

Both of these decisions (USDA Forest Service and BLM) and findings are based on the analysis in the EA prepared for this project. A list of other documents considered and incorporated by reference is presented in Section 1.6.3 of the EA (EA, pages 1-8 to 1-9).

Factors Other than Environmental Effects Considered in this Decision

In addition to the environmental effects documented in the EA prepared for this project, this decision also considered the purpose and need for the project (EA, page 1-2).

¹ Additional information on the history of Entiat is available on the city of Entiat’s web site: <http://www.entiat.org/history.htm>

Decision Rationale

As Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, I am choosing to issue a special use permit to the District to construct and operate and maintain a new 115 kV transmission line across 2.6 miles of NFS land. As Field Manager for the Wenatchee Field Office of the BLM, I am choosing to issue a right-of-way to construct and operate and maintain a new 115 kV transmission line across 0.4 mile of BLM land. The special use permit and right-of-way respond to the proponent's proposal to provide for this public service.

In both cases, this decision is based on the analysis documented in the EA showing that: a) the project will improve and correct existing and projected deficiencies in electrical service in the Entiat Valley, and b) with mitigation measures in place the selected alternative will not result in any significant environmental impacts. This analysis is briefly summarized in the following paragraph and discussed at length in the EA.

The District's Entiat electrical system is currently experiencing brownouts and other outages under certain conditions and these outages are expected to continue and worsen as electrical demand in the valley increases. Construction of the transmission line and associated facilities will meet the project purpose and need of providing reliable electricity to Entiat Valley customers, without substantially interrupting existing service and correct these existing and projected capacity deficiencies, eliminate voltage drops under normal conditions, and allow for emergency switching and sectionalizing fault areas to reduce outages all of which will provide reliable electricity to customers (EA, pages 2-21, 3.9-7). The selected transmission line route will for the most part parallel the existing BPA transmission corridor across NFS and BLM lands and the District's contractor will use existing roads to access the transmission structures. In some cases, it will be necessary to extend these existing roads to the new structure locations in some location. Where necessary, these extensions will take the form of unimproved temporary access trails without surfacing or regular maintenance. These temporary access trails will be rehabilitated once construction of the transmission line is completed. With these and the other mitigation measures identified in Section 2.5 of the EA in place (EA, pages 2-7 to 2-13), the selected alternative is not expected to result in any significant environmental impacts to Federal (e.g., NFS and BLM) or other lands.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The EA for this project evaluated two alternatives: Alternative 1 (the proposed action) and Alternative 2 (the no action alternative). The District and the Focus Group established for this project conducted an intensive evaluation of a full range of alternatives that were identified through a series of public meetings. This evaluation resulted in the identification of the proposed action and provided sufficient rationale to eliminate the other proposed action alternatives from further consideration (see EA, pages 2-13 to 2-21). These other alternatives were eliminated for two main reasons: a) they failed to meet the refined purpose and need, which requires that the project provide reliable electricity to its customers in the Entiat service area without substantially interrupting existing service, and/or b) they included substantial "green field" construction over mostly undisturbed areas and would require extensive construction of new access roads. There also were no unresolved conflicts raised, because all could be handled through mitigation or design criteria consistent with Forest Service NEPA regulations at 36 CFR 220.7(b)(2)(i).

Alternative 2 (no action) was not selected because it does not meet the project purpose and need as it does not correct the capacity deficiency nor provide reliable electricity to customers.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Collaboration

As noted above, in 2005 the District formed the Entiat Valley Electrical Upgrade Focus Group, which consisted of local residents and Federal and state agency representatives, to assist in the development and review of potential options to improve electrical service to the Entiat Valley. Options and solutions to the purpose and need for the project were identified and evaluated through this collaborative process, which resulted in the options being narrowed to the proposed action and the no-action alternative.

Scoping

Public scoping was conducted for this project by:

- Sending a scoping package to approximately 1,000 people, organizations, and government agencies, including all District customers in the city of Entiat and the Entiat Valley, other potentially affected landowners, local public officials, and the USDA Forest Service's existing public involvement mailing lists.
- Publishing a legal notice announcing a 30 day comment period on the proposal in the Wenatchee World newspaper on May 18, 2007.
- Listing the project in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on July 1, 2008.

Consultation

Separate government-to-government consultation was conducted with the Yakama Indian Nation and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation. Letters were mailed to both governments on May 11, 2007. Neither government raised any issues with the proposed project.

The State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the findings (the determination of No Historic Properties Affected) relating to this project on June 16, 2008.

A level 1 consultation meeting was held with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on July 7, 2008, and concurrence from that agency was received on August 15, 2008. A level 1 consultation meeting was also held with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on July 7, 2008, and concurrence from that agency was received on August 7, 2008.

Public Comment on the EA

The EA was issued by the joint lead agencies and the BLM in June 2008. A 30-day public comment period was provided and members of the public, interested organizations, and other public agencies were encouraged to submit comments in writing, via fax, email, or regular mail. The agencies received a total of three comment letters during the official public comment period, with an additional two comment letters submitted after the end of the public comment period. These comment letters and the agencies' responses are part of the project file. Changes to the EA text as a result of the comments received are identified in the "Errata and Additional Information" subsection above.

ISSUES

The following issues were identified based on comments made by the public and government agencies during the scoping process (EA, pages 1-9 to 1-10). These issues were identified and reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists established for this project. Issues identified during scoping are normally addressed by developing alternatives to the proposed

action; however, the identified issues were all resolved in the selected alternative by mitigation and, therefore, did not result in the development of other action alternatives.

These issues are summarized and discussed in the following subsections by environmental resource. They are also addressed in the corresponding resource-specific sections in Chapter 3 of the EA. The identified issues are presented below in *italics*.

Geology

- *Building the proposed switchyard in an area subject to rock slides could present a number of problems, including an increased risk of wildfire.* – No evidence of material from the cliff that would be likely to cause significant damage was observed on or in the immediate vicinity of the selected switchyard site. Structures located on the steep, rocky terrain would be delivered by helicopter and installed by hand crews to reduce the potential risks of project-related land and rock slides. Rock barriers will be placed at the foot of the slope to buffer and protect the switchyard and equipment from falling rocks. (EA, page 3.3-9)

Vegetation

- *Construction activities have the potential to increase the abundance and/or diversity of noxious weeds.* – Disturbance associated with the project would be limited and temporary and with mitigation in place is not expected to have a significant effect on the populations (abundance and/or diversity) of noxious weeds. Mitigation is required to prevent noxious weed spread or establishment in new areas (EA, pages 2-10 to 2-11, and 3.4-7 to 3.4-8)
- *Construction and maintenance of the proposed transmission line would require the removal of conifers and could result in reduced forest canopy in the affected area.* – Vegetation clearing within the right-of-way will be mainly limited to trees that exceed transmission line clearance requirements and will be unlikely to negatively affect canopy closure in the analysis area. There is no way to avoid all removal of trees, however, only approximately 150 trees will be removed on Federal lands (EA, pages 3.4-5 to 3.4-7)

Wildlife

- *The proposed action could have detrimental effects on wildlife in the project area.* – Timing restrictions and other mitigation measures are designed to minimize impacts to wildlife species. No long term impacts to wildlife are expected. (EA, pages 2-11 to 2-12, Section 3.5)
- *The proposed action could directly impact mule deer habitat through impacts to vegetation.* – The minor reduction in winter range (less than 1 percent of the affected winter range units) will not preclude the continued use of the analysis area as winter range. (EA, page 3.5-17)
- *There could be indirect impacts to wintering mule deer from construction and operation and maintenance activities, as well as from increased human access due to project roads and trails.* – Timing restrictions and other mitigation measures will minimize construction- and operations and maintenance-related impacts to mule deer. The temporary access trails will provide only temporary access to the project area and all are outside the mule deer zone of influence. These trails will be closed following construction. (EA, page 3.5-17)
- *Potential impacts to mule deer could affect gray wolves and grizzly bears, which are Federally listed endangered species within the project area and depend upon mule deer as a year-round food resource and a post-emergence spring food resource, respectively.* – There would be low level indirect impacts to both species from a minor reduction in

deer winter range. (EA, pages 3.5-16 to 3.5-17). The USFWS concurred that the project may affect, but is not likely to affect either species (see the concurrence letter in the project file).

Visual

- *Light generated by the proposed switchyard could affect nearby residents.* – The switchyard would be lighted for security in accordance with the National Electric Security Code. Shields would be installed so that light would be directed downward, rather than illuminating the sky. (EA, page 3.7-9)
- *Construction activities and the introduction of permanent structures could affect the quality of existing views from State Highway 97 Alternate (Highway 97A), which is part of the Cascade Loop Scenic Byway, as well as the views from the Columbia River and Entiat River Road.* – Mitigation was included requiring helicopter delivery on steep visible slopes and hand digging to eliminate the need for visible roads in those areas. In addition, structures will be fabricated from Korten steel, which is a weatherized/oxidized steel and generates a less visible brown rust coating, insulators are required to be non-lustrous (i.e., non-ceramic), and existing vegetation will be retained to the extent possible. All of these measures will reduce impacts to visual quality (EA, page 2-12). The new line will result in incremental visual impacts to the existing transmission line corridor. The overall impact is expected to be low due to the high level of compatibility between the new structures and the existing natural and man-made landscape, and Visual Quality Objectives will be met on all NFS lands. (EA, pages 3.7-6 to 3.7-8)

Social and Economic

- *Potential rate increases required to pay for the project could negatively affect the city of Entiat and valley residents.* – This project will not be the primary reason for seeking future rate increases, but will contribute to the overall need for additional revenue. However, the District's electric rate structure is based on rate class and type of service, not residential location. City of Entiat and Entiat Valley residents will continue to pay the same rates as others receiving the same type of service in Chelan County (including any future rate increases). (EA, page 3.9-7)
- *Potential impacts to mule deer could affect mule deer hunting, which is a highly valued, traditional activity within the project area, and an important source of tourist revenue to local communities.* – The project is not expected to have significant effects on mule deer populations and is, therefore, not expected to affect mule deer hunting and associated tourist revenue. (EA, page 3.9-7)
- *Traffic associated with construction and operation of the proposed switchyard could generate traffic impacts on Highway 97A.* – This issue does not relate to any impacts on Federal lands, however, construction and operation of the switchyard would have limited impacts on existing traffic flows on Highway 97A. The District will improve an existing unpaved access road from Highway 97A. Once improved, this turnoff will be sufficient to accommodate switchyard-related traffic without interfering with existing traffic flows along Highway 97A. (EA, page 3.9-8)

Health and Safety, including Fire and Noise

- *Noise generated by the proposed switchyard could affect nearby residents.* – This issue does not relate to impacts on Federal lands, however, construction noise will be short-term and localized. Development of the switchyard site will involve the use of conventional excavation equipment, including a backhoe, bulldozer, and excavator.

Construction and operation noise will meet all applicable noise limits. (EA, pages 3.10-4 to 3.10-5)

- *Falling rocks and boulders could hit the proposed switchyard and potentially spark a wildfire.* – See the response to the same issue under Geology above.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Both agencies (USDA Forest Service and BLM) have determined through the Entiat Valley 115 kV Transmission Program Environmental Assessment that this is not a major federal action individually or cumulatively that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. These findings of no significant impact are based on analysis of the context and intensity of the environmental effects, including the ten factors identified in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1508.27 and discussed below.

Viewed in terms of geographical context, the environmental impacts of the selected alternative will be site-specific. The benefits associated with meeting the project purpose and need (EA, page 1-2) will have a wider geographic context and be felt in the city of Entiat and the Entiat Valley.

1. Analysis of the beneficial and adverse impacts:

A full discussion of the beneficial and adverse impacts of the selected alternative is presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. The following summary is organized by potentially affected resource, with the resources summarized in the same order they are addressed in Chapter 3 of the EA.

Beneficial Effects	Adverse Effects
Air Quality	
Air quality within State standards. Class 1 airsheds not expected to be impacted (EA, page 3.2-3).	Short-term reduction in local ambient air quality due to emissions from equipment and vehicle use during construction.
Soil, Water, and Fish	
Soil - Temporary access trails used to extend existing roads to new locations will be decommissioned once transmission line construction is completed. These trails will be sub-soiled or scarified prior to seeding and planted with a seed mix approved by the appropriate land-managing or regulatory agency. Obstructions, such as large rocks, will be placed in the recontoured areas to restrict unauthorized access (EA, page 2-9).	Some soil compaction but mitigated by use of existing roads and other disturbed areas to the extent possible, transporting structures via helicopter, and other mitigation measures (EA, pages 3.3-7 to 3.3-8). Short term erosion increase but impacts will be mitigated through the use of silt fences, mulch, native grass seed, or other erosion and sediment control measures (EA, pages 3.3-6 to 3.3-7).
Water - No perennial streams or waterbodies will be crossed. Temporary access trails used to extend existing roads to new structure locations will be decommissioned once transmission line construction is completed. There will be no impact to any 303(d) listed waterbodies (EA,	Low potential for sediment to reach the Entiat River will be eliminated or reduced by mitigation (EA, page 3.3-11).

Beneficial Effects	Adverse Effects
pages 3.3-9 to 3.3-10).	
Fish - No impacts to ESA-listed species are expected because in-water work or removal of riparian vegetation along Crum Canyon or the Entiat River will not be required. No effects to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). No effects to Riparian Reserves. (EA, page 3.3-11)	Low potential for sediment to reach the Entiat River will be eliminated or reduced by mitigation. (EA, page 3.3-11)
Vegetation	
General Vegetation -	Disturbance to approximately 8.8 acres of vegetation, including approximately 4.9 acres that have been heavily disturbed in the past. Vegetation clearance within the right-of-way will be mainly limited to trees that exceed transmission line clearance requirements and will be unlikely to negatively affect canopy closure in the analysis area. A total of approximately 150 trees are expected to be impacted on NFS lands. Less than 5 trees on BLM lands will be affected. (EA, pages 3.4-5 to 3.4-7)
Noxious Weeds – Weed pre-treatment may be employed prior to disturbance in areas where weeds are heavily concentrated. Disturbed areas will be stabilized and reseeded in the fall following disturbance to further inhibit weeds from becoming established. If herbicides are used on NFS lands they would be in the area and of the kind that are approved in the existing Wenatchee National Forest Noxious Weed EA and decision. (EA, pages 2-10 to 2-11)	Limited and temporary ground disturbance and the impacts of vehicular traffic will be mitigated using an Integrated Weed Management approach and are not expected to have a significant effect on populations of noxious weeds. (EA, pages 2-10 to 2-11, 3.4-7 to 3.4-8)
Rare Plants – None identified in the analysis area. (EA, pages 3.4-5 and 3.4-8)	
Wildlife	
Mule deer -	Minor reduction in winter range (less than 1 percent of the affected winter range units). (EA, page 3.5-17)
Grizzly Bear – May affect, but not likely to adversely affect. No change to current areas of grizzly bear core habitat. Low level indirect impacts from minor reduction in deer winter range. (EA, page 3.5-16 to 3.5-17)	
Gray Wolf - May affect, but not likely to adversely affect. Low level indirect impacts from minor reduction in deer winter range. (EA, pages 3.5-16 to 3.5-17)	
Chelan Mountain snail -	Low level impact from ground disturbance on existing populations and habitat minimized by

Beneficial Effects	Adverse Effects
	the selected mitigation measures. (EA, page 3.5-18)
Raptors and Cavity Nesters - Downed trees will be left on the ground as large woody debris, or high-topped and left as snags. The selected alternative will be consistent with USDA Forest Service snag and coarse woody debris guidelines (EA, pages 3.5-13 to 3.5-15)	Minor removal of mature trees. (EA, pages 3.5-13 to 3.5-15).
Recreation	
No developed recreation facilities exist within the analysis area. (EA, page 3.6-8)	Potential short-term, localized displacement of hunters during construction. (EA, page 3.6-8)
Visual Resources	
All Visual Quality Objectives on federal lands met. (EA, pages 3.7-10 to 3.7-11)	The new transmission line corridor will result in limited, incremental impacts to the existing transmission line corridor it parallels. (EA, pages 3.7-10 to 3.7-11).
Cultural Resources	
No newly or previously documented cultural resources were identified in the analysis area. (EA, page 3.8-3)	If undocumented sites are discovered, mitigation will include stopping construction until an archaeologist is consulted. (EA, page 2-13)
Social and Economic Environment	
Electrical Service - Will correct an electrical service capacity deficiency in the Entiat Valley, prevent “brownouts”, and improve the reliability of the electrical supply to residents and businesses in the Entiat Valley.	
Transportation – Will have no noticeable effect to traffic on State Highway 97A. (EA, page 3.9-8)	
Employment – Will provide short-term employment for the construction labor force and have related, minor beneficial impacts on the local economy. (EA, page 3.9-6)	
Noise, Public Health and Safety	
Noise –	Construction noise will be short-term and localized. Construction and operation noise will meet all applicable noise limits. (EA, pages 3.10-4 to 3.10-5)
Electric and Magnetic Fields – Will not preclude normal public or occupational use in the analysis area. (EA, pages 3.10-5 to 3.10-6)	
Fire -	Potential construction- and operation-related fire risk will be minimized by mitigation. (EA, page 3.10-6)

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety:

There are limited health and safety hazards to District staff and contractors, Forest Service and BLM employees, and the general public from the project. None are unusual or unique to this project. Recreationists and some home owners could encounter construction traffic, but these encounters will be short-term and localized. Potential fire risk will be minimized during project construction. The District will require all contractors to carry fire suppression tools (shovel, axe, and fire extinguisher) and to be trained in fire suppression techniques in accordance with USDA Forest Service and BLM policy. Construction will be restricted in accordance with applicable fire-related standards and guidelines. In addition, the District will establish and maintain safe clearances between the tops of trees and the new transmission line (EA, page 3.10-6). Any herbicide use on NFS lands will follow the requirements of the existing 1999 Wenatchee National Forest Noxious Weed EA and decision (EA, pages 2-10 to 2-11).

3. The unique characteristics of the geographic area:

No parklands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas are found within the project area (EA, pages 3.11-1 to 3.11-2). The selected alternative would affect approximately 1.5 acres of "prime farmland when irrigated" and 0.07 acre of "farmland of statewide importance" (EA, page 3.11-1 to 3.11-2). No effects are expected to cultural resources or historic properties (EA, page 3.8-3). There will be no effect to riparian vegetation protected within Riparian Reserves buffers (EA, page 3.3-11). EFH will not be affected (EA, page 3.3-11).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:

There has been no scientifically backed information presented that indicates substantial controversy about the effects disclosed in the Entiat Valley 115 kV Transmission Program EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified for the Entiat Valley 115 kV Transmission Program EA. The components of the proposed action approved in this combined decision notice/decision record are routine activities similar to others that have been implemented under the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 18 years and under the BLM's Spokane Resource Management Plan since 1992. None are unique or involve unknown risks. The majority of the transmission project parallels and is adjacent to the existing BPA transmission lines. The District has considerable experience building, operating, and maintaining electric transmission lines and will hire qualified contractors to design and build the new line.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects:

Activities approved in this combined decision notice/decision record are routine projects similar to others that have been implemented under the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 18 years and under the BLM's Spokane Resource Management Plan since 1992. None are new or precedent setting. The majority of the transmission project parallels and is adjacent to the existing BPA transmission lines.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts:

Each resource effects analysis contained in the EA discusses cumulative effects; none were found to be significant (EA, Chapter 3, Resource Cumulative Effects sections).

8. The degree to which the action may affect scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

There are no scientific resources in the project area. No districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places will be affected. No effects are expected to cultural or historical resources (EA, page 3.8-3). If ground disturbing or other activities result in the inadvertent discovery of archaeological deposits on NFS or BLM land, work will be halted within 100 feet of the discovery and the State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) in Olympia and the Forest or BLM Archaeologist will be contacted. Work will be halted until such time as further investigation and appropriate consultation is concluded (EA, page 2-13). The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation and the Yakama Nation were consulted on this project; no concerns were raised by either Tribal government. The State Historic Preservation Office was consulted and concurred on this project.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect endangered or threatened species or habitats:

Endangered or threatened species that may inhabit the area will not be significantly affected. Habitat is present for the gray wolf and grizzly bear, both of which are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act. The project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect either of these species (EA, pages 3.5-16 and 3.5-17). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings of the Biological Assessment prepared for this project on August 15, 2008. There will be no effect on the northern spotted owl because no habitat is present (EA, page 3.5-2). The project will have no effect on threatened or endangered plant species (EA, page 3.4-8).

The project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the endangered and threatened species present in the downstream reaches of the Entiat River: Upper Columbia River spring Chinook salmon, Upper Columbia River steelhead, or Upper Columbia River bull trout (EA, page 3.3-11). The project will have no effect on EFH (EA, page 3.3-11). The NMFS concurred with the findings of the Biological Assessment prepared for this project on August 7, 2008. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings of the Biological Assessment on August 15, 2008.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental laws or requirements:

Discussion of compliance with environmental laws or requirements is identified in the following section on compliance with other laws and regulations. This project will not violate any environmental laws or regulations.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The following paragraphs summarize the findings required by other laws and regulations, with references to the locations of supporting information in the EA and the project file, as appropriate:

- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). This project and the associated EA are consistent with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, its implementing regulations, and the Forest Service NEPA Regulations and handbook, and BLM NEPA Regulations and handbook.
- Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1990. The project is consistent with the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) as amended. Forest-wide standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan require land use requests to be compatible with the Forest Plan prescriptions and allocations and encourage new utility proposals to be accommodated within existing corridors to the maximum extent feasible (Forest Plan, page IV-100). The portions of the Wenatchee National Forest within the project area are managed in accordance with the 1990 Forest Plan under the EW-1, Key Deer and Elk Habitat, and UC-1, Utility Corridor, Management Prescriptions. Both of these prescriptions allow electric transmission lines (EA, pages 1-6 to 1-7). This project utilizes the existing BPA corridor and access roads to the extent practical and directly adjacent lands.
- This Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) (1994) applies to a portion of the NFS lands within the project area. These lands are designated Matrix and Riparian Reserves in the NWFP. Matrix standards and guidelines require that specified amounts of coarse woody debris and snags be met, and old-growth fragments be retained. Except for safety hazards, all hard snags, damaged and dying trees, and effective live trees will be retained. Only approximately 150 trees would be felled or topped to provide snags and coarse wood and NWFP snag and down wood requirements would be met or exceeded (EA, page 3.5-15). All project activities are located outside of riparian reserves, and none of the nine aquatic conservation strategy objectives will be impacted (EA, page 3.3-11). Forested portions of the project area are comprised of widely spaced conifer trees with limited natural canopy closure; therefore there would be no impact to old growth fragments along the transmission route (EA, page 3.4-1).
- BLM Spokane Resource Management Plan and Amendments, Record of Decision, 1992. The project is consistent with the BLM Spokane Resource Management Plan and amendments. The selected transmission line route will cross two small parcels of BLM lands within the Spokane Resource Management Plan's Scattered Tracts Management Area. These parcels are managed for multiple uses, which may include transmission lines (EA, page 1-7).
- Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended). The project will either have no effect or will not likely adversely affect any species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (see EA, pages 3.5-16 to 3.5-17, 3.4-8, and 3.3-11 for wildlife, plants, and fish, respectively, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NMFS concurrence letters in the project file).
- The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (as amended). The project will have no effect on EFH (EA, page 3.3-11, see also the NMFS concurrence letter in the project file).
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended). No districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places will be affected. No effects are expected to cultural or historical resources (EA, page 3.8-3, see also the DAHP concurrence letter in the project file).

- Clean Water Act of 1977 and 1982 (as amended). Clean Water Act standards will be met. Very little sedimentation and no increase in temperature are expected due to project construction and operation (EA, pages 3.3-9 to 3.3-10). No impacts to wetlands or floodplains, or prime range or farm lands are expected (EA, pages 3.11-1 to 3.11-2).
- Clean Air Act (as amended). Clean Air Act standards will be met. Impacts to air quality in the Alpine Lake and Glacier Peak wildernesses, the nearest Class I Airsheds, will be negligible (EA, page 3.2-3).
- The project is not expected to disproportionately affect minority or low income populations (EA, pages 3.9-10, 3.9-11, and 3.11-3)

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OPPORTUNITY

The USDA Forest Service and BLM have different comment and appeal procedures. The appeal procedures for this project differ by agency and are summarized below:

USDA Forest Service

The decision made by the USDA Forest Service is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. An appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.15, "Appeal Content", and must provide sufficient evidence and rationale to show why the decision of the Responsible Official should be remanded or reversed. Appeals must be in writing and must be emailed, postmarked or hand delivered (between 7:45 AM and 4:30 PM) to the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the date of publication of the notice in the Wenatchee World newspaper. Appeals may be submitted via regular mail or delivered in person to the below address, or submitted via email to appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us or via fax: 503-808-2255.

Hand Delivery or Delivery Service

Appeal Deciding Officer
Attention: 1570 Appeals
USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region
333 SW First Avenue
Portland, OR 97204-3440

U. S. Mail

Appeal Deciding Officer
Attention: 1570 Appeals
USDA Forest Service
P. O. Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208-3623

The publication date of the legal notice in the Wenatchee World newspaper is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal and those wishing to appeal should not rely on dates or timeframes provided by any other source. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their appeals are received in a timely manner. For electronically mailed appeals, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of the appeal, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Electronic appeals must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format or portable document format only. Emails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above or in other formats than those listed or containing viruses will be rejected.

BLM

The decision made by the BLM would be implemented through the issuance of a right-of-way grant to the District. After the grant offer has been signed by the District and returned to BLM, it will be formally approved (signed) by BLM, and issued along with a final decision (43 CFR §

2805.10(b)). For a 30 day period thereafter, the final decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and BLM Form 1842-1. If an appeal is taken, the notice of appeal must be filed at the BLM Wenatchee Field Office (915 Walla Walla, Wenatchee, WA 98801) within 30 days from receipt of the final decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If an appellant wishes to file a petition (request) pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 2801.10 or 43 CFR 2881.10 for a stay (suspension) of the effectiveness of the right-of-way grant during the time their appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany their notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If a stay is requested, the appellant has the burden of proof to demonstrate that it should be granted.

Standards for Obtaining a Stay

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
- The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation on NFS lands may occur 45 days, plus 5 business days following the date of publication of the above-referenced appeal notice in the Wenatchee World newspaper, provided no appeals are filed. If an appeal is received, and the decision is ultimately affirmed, the project may not be implemented until 45 days plus 15 business days after the close of the appeal period.

Implementation on the BLM land would occur upon approval (signature) of the right-of-way grant and issuance of the final decision, unless an appeal is timely filed and a stay request is approved by Interior Board of Land Appeals.

AGENCY CONTACTS

The USDA Forest Service contact for this project is: Tom Graham, Entiat Ranger District, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, 2108 Entiat Way, Entiat, WA 98822 (tgraham@fs.fed.us or 509-784-1511).

The BLM contact is: Bill Schurger, Bureau of Land Management, Wenatchee Field Office, 915 Walla Walla Avenue, Wenatchee, WA 98801 (William_Schurger@blm.gov or 509-665-2100).

SIGNATURES

/S/ Rebecca Lockett Heath

9/10/08

Rebecca Lockett Heath
USDA Forest Service
Forest Supervisor
Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest

DATE

/S/ Dana Peterson, Acting Field Manager
For

9/10/08

Karen Kelleher
USDI Bureau of Land Management
Field Manager
Wenatchee Field Office

DATE



Legend

- Existing BPA 345 kV and 500 kV Power Line Corridor
- Entiat 115 kV Transmission Line

Attachment 1 - Selected Alternative

Entiat 115 kV Transmission Line Program

